

The Red Tail

www.redtailmovie.com

56-Minute Available through IDFA Docs for Sale!

Directors/Producers/Editors: Melissa Koch & Dawn Mikkelson

Director of Photography: Adrian Danciu

Music Supervisor: Lori Barbero

Graphic Animation and Design: Joseph Whiteis

Associate Producers: Beth Wilson & Chris Waller

Sound Mix: Carly Zuckweiler

Soundtrack includes: JoAnna James, Martin Devaney, Mike Gunther & His Restless Souls, Artifact Shore, Linedotstar, Michael Koch, Robert McCready, SIS Tuner, and Audio Liberation Society

Run Time: 86-minutes & 56-minutes

World Premiere – 2009 Galway Film Fleadh, Ireland: July 11, 2009

Additional Screenings & Appearances –

- Sheffield Doc/Fest: Videotheque, England: Nov 4-8, 2009
- Leipzig DOK Market, Germany: Oct 26-Nov 1, 2009
- Flyway Film Festival, Pepin, WI: Oct 25, 2009
- 2009 Reel Work May Day Labor Film Festival, Santa Cruz, CA: April 30, 2009 (*Sneak Preview*)
- 2009 Minneapolis/St. Paul International Film Festival, MN: April 23, 2009 (*Sneak Preview*)
- Riverview Theatre, Minneapolis, MN: February 24, 2010
- Lanesboro Arts Center, Lanesboro, MN: January 29, 2010
- The Pax Salon, St Paul, MN: April 6, 2010
- 2010 Labor Notes Conference, Detroit, MI: April 23 & 24, 2010
- 2010 US Social Forum, Detroit, MI: June 24, 2010
- LaborFest, San Francisco, CA: July 6, 2010
- DocuFest Atlanta, GA: Aug 21, 2010
- IDFA Docs for Sale (Amsterdam): November 2010

Short Description

On August 19, 2005 Roy Koch, along with 4,400 airline mechanics, custodians, and cleaners, went on strike against Northwest Airlines, the fourth largest airline in the world. Northwest, otherwise known as “The Red Tail” by its employees, wanted to lay off 53% of their union and outsource their jobs. What followed was a 444-day strike that would end with 4,000 union members out of work, including Roy.

Instead of being left in the wake of this battle, Roy and his daughter Melissa (co-director of *The Red Tail*) set on a journey to meet the worker to whom Roy’s job was outsourced in China. The journey provides a renewed sense of purpose for Roy, and while Melissa wants to get answers to his plight, her determination as a filmmaker is always tempered by her love as a daughter. The film interweaves Roy and Melissa’s

search for connection in China with the premeditated downfall of Northwest Airlines. This downfall serves a vibrant example of the dangers of our current economic system, and casts a spotlight on the future of the working class.

“These are the days that a programmer is besieged by documentaries that explain the financial crisis that our world has found itself in. *The Red Tail* managed to illustrate the effect greed has against communities, families and a man’s dignity in such a wonderful manner, congratulations. – Felim, MacDermott, Galway Film Fleadh Program

The Story

On August 19, 2005 Roy Koch, along with 4,400 airline mechanics, custodians, and cleaners, went on strike against Northwest Airlines, the 4th largest airline in the world. Northwest, otherwise known as “The Red Tail” by its employees, wanted to lay off 53% of their union and outsource their jobs. What followed was a 444 day strike that would end with 4,000 union members out of work, including Roy. Instead of being left in the wake of this “losing battle”, Roy and his daughter Melissa (Co-director of “The Red Tail”) decide to follow Roy’s outsourced job to China. The film interweaves Roy and Melissa’s search for connection in China with the premeditated downfall of Northwest Airlines. (Which becomes Delta Airlines, the largest airline to ever take to the skies). This downfall is a vibrant example of the dangers of our current economic system, which serves to make the rich richer even as the middle and working classes disappear. Their journey takes the viewer to the heart of the challenge facing the global working class – what is our place in the global economy? – In the world?

At age 58, Roy Koch was looking forward to his hard-earned retirement after 38 years of working as an aircraft mechanic. Left in the wake of a failed strike, Roy is no longer the breadwinner in his family and wonders what to do now. In August of 2007 the entire Koch family takes their first journey to Hong Kong to meet the workers at HAECO (Hong Kong Aircraft Engineering Company), one of the major maintenance bases currently serving Northwest Airlines, as well as United, Delta, and a host of other international airlines. Our main character, Roy, and his family share an irreverent humor and understanding of their lives within a global context. The Koch’s journey is a search for dignity amidst the helplessness experienced by global workers; a quest to reclaim their power. While in Hong Kong, the Koch family not only meets Roy’s replacement and the top brass at HAECO, but they also become enmeshed in the bigger picture. Serendipitously, the ironworkers of Hong Kong are waging one of the largest strikes in Hong Kong in the past century. The Koch family does what any “good union family” would do; they join them in the streets of Hong Kong.

Upon learning that Roy’s Hong Kong replacement is also being threatened with outsourcing, Roy and Melissa journey to Xiamen, China nine months later to meet workers who will eventually replace the Hong Kong workers. In mainland China Roy and Melissa witness a growing middle class and learn that upper management at TAECO (Xiamen’s Aircraft Engineering Company and sister company to HAECO) are preparing for the day when the jobs at TAECO will again be outsourced to the next cheapest market, leaving thousands of workers in Xiamen without jobs.

The Red Tail looks at our broken economic system which encourages and rewards CEOs and upper management to line their own pockets instead of caring for the heart of a company: its long-term stability and life-long employees. It also shows the common struggles that workers experience worldwide through an endless chain of outsourcing.

The Red Tail offers a new perspective on globalization and the lives that hang in the balance.

Statement from Director/Producer, Melissa Koch

When my Dad went on strike, he walked out knowing that he may never return to his career of 38 years. I saw it simultaneously break his heart and re-enforce his commitment to his underlying values of integrity and solidarity. He is certainly not alone – people are facing these life-altering situations and decisions across the globe at an increasingly alarming rate. How can we be in solidarity with each other through these difficult times, both within our own families and communities, and with workers globally? How can someone like Roy Koch, or the mechanics in Hong Kong and China participate in the discussion about their own futures and be more connected with each other? I was inspired to make *The Red Tail* and travel to China to meet and connect with the people that replaced my Dad and his co-workers in a search to answer these questions. When the dust settles from the ruckus about the banks and multi-national corporations losing money in the economic crisis, it is the people of the world who will still be standing in the wake and their voices that matter the most.

Statement from Director/Producer, Dawn Mikkelson

The Koch family's strength, humor, and unwavering belief in the goodness of working people is what inspired me to continue telling this story. Upon meeting Melissa and her family, I knew that the story of *The Red Tail* was more than just the story of one company and its downfall, but it is the story of what it is to be a worker in today's society. I am so honored by their honesty and participation in this film. These are not victims of a failed industry or union battle, but real survivors of our present global economy.

Story Behind the film . . .

In August of 2005 the mechanics at Northwest Airlines went on strike. Filmmaker and daughter of a striking mechanic, Melissa Koch, armed with a video camera, had unparalleled access to the human struggle of the mechanics during the early days of their strike and began shooting what was to become *The Red Tail*. Soon after, Beth Wilson (Associate Producer/Research), an NWA flight attendant, quit her job rather than cross the picket line. Disillusioned and inspired, Wilson went in search of a documentary filmmaker to tell the story of the workers of NWA. A story that was neglected by the mainstream media. This search lead her to award-winning filmmaker Dawn Mikkelson. Moved by this flight attendant's passion and seeing the global implications of this story, Mikkelson began filming. It didn't take long for these

two documentary teams to discover one another and join together as one. Since that time, the team has grown to include Chris Waller (Associate Producer/Writer), Lori Barbero (Music Supervisor), Adrian Danciu (Director of Photography), and Carly Zuckweiler (Sound Designer).

Adventures in International Travel!

Crossing into China was an adventure that included hiding our gear in our luggage, traveling on tourist visas, crossing at the most busy land border in small groups, celebrating when no one was watching the metal detector monitor as the luggage went through, and surviving Chinese WalMarts, Olympic Torch Runs, and a major earthquake.

Frequently Asked Questions

What airline did you fly on your trips to China? The crew flew a combination of United, Sun Country, and China Air. Our major flights were primarily donated, although a few were booked with the financial support of hundreds on individual donors.

Why didn't you fly Northwest? We believed it was a conflict of interest to the story, as well as disrespectful of all the striking NWA mechanics, custodians, and cleaners.

Why didn't you interview Northwest Airlines or its CEO, Doug Steenland? We tried, but were denied an interview. We were told that they were too busy with merger plans with Delta.

How did the merger of Northwest with Delta impact your film? This merger, although not final until our final weeks of post-production, falls perfectly into the trajectory of our story. As the story of the downfall of Northwest Airlines unfolds, it is clear that this merger was coming for a long time and that is what we were expecting. From the two airlines declaring bankruptcy on the same day, in the same court in Delaware (even though they were based in Minnesota and Georgia), to former NWA CEO Richard Anderson becoming the CEO of Delta approximately one year ago, this merger is not a surprise to anyone in our crew. It also reinforces what many of our interview subjects were predicting, that eventually the US will be left with only a couple of major carriers, while the others disappear. It appears to be the way of this industry and so many others . . .

Why do you conceal the identities of the Chinese mechanics that you interviewed? This was a choice we made early on upon considering the history of Chinese workers in films by US documentary filmmakers. We did not wish to be the reason that one more Chinese worker "disappears", never to be heard from again. This is a choice that was reinforced when we shot in China and experienced a small slice of life in a country that does not have freedom of the press or freedom of speech. Sure, we could have searched for a worker who had an axe to grind, who was willing to lose his or her life to share this story, but we were far more interested in speaking with the "average" Chinese airline mechanic.

Production Personnel

Dawn Mikkelson (Executive Producer/Director/Writer): 2010 McKnight Filmmaking Fellow and named to *AV Multimedia Producer's* 2004 National "Top Producers Showcase", Mikkelson's work has been seen on PBS, OUTtv, and Free Speech TV, as well as screening at countless international festivals including the Galway Film Fleadh, Cambridge Film Festival, IDFA Docs for Sale (International Documentary Festival Amsterdam), DocuFest Atlanta, Leipzig DOK Market, American Indian Film Festival, Planet in Focus, and Washington DC Environmental Film Festival. Mikkelson has completed four award-winning feature documentaries. Her films, *The Red Tail*, *Green Green Water*, *THIS obedience*, and *Treading Water: a documentary*, illuminate larger societal issues while creating understanding through the intimate stories of individuals. Mikkelson has just begun production on her fifth film, *SMOOCH* (www.smoochdocumentary.com). "From a mother in urban Minneapolis who kisses the cheek of her child's killer, to an Israeli husband kissing his Palestinian wife, *SMOOCH* shows the power of love and affection overshadowing our differences in opinion, ethnicity, and social class. *SMOOCH* illuminates stories of reconciliation and healing from around the world, as participants are photographed through the international effort to collect 10,000 photos of people kissing one another on the cheek called The Smooch! Project."

A former television news reporter at an ABC affiliate, Mikkelson often speaks and writes on issues around documentary filmmaking and social justice for MPR (Minnesota Public Radio) and MovieMaker Magazine and at numerous international festival panels, as well as speaking at colleges and universities across the country. Mikkelson has taught Documentary Film as Adjunct Faculty at Ottawa University in Kansas, as well as IFP/MN in Minneapolis.

Melissa Koch (Producer/Director/Writer): Koch is an emerging filmmaker introducing her feature-length documentary debut, "The Red Tail." She is a multi-disciplinary media-artist who has directed narrative short films and has worked in documentary video, photography, and radio. Koch studied cultural studies, media arts, and social change at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities and the University of Tasmania, Australia. She has worked with community organizations for twelve years primarily focusing on work with youth, LGBTQ communities, and the arts. In addition to working as a free-lance video producer, Koch is currently in the PhD program in UC Santa Cruz for Film & Digital Media.

Lori Barbero (Music Supervisor): Lori Barbero was the co-founder and drummer for Babes in Toyland, a hard rock band from Minneapolis. They were some of the precursors of what came to be known in the early 1990s as RiotGrrl, a subgenre of grunge music. In 1990, Babes in Toyland toured with Sonic Youth throughout Europe. The group's break into the national scene came in 1992 with the release of their first full-length album *Fontanelle* and inclusion in the documentary film *1991: The Year Punk Broke*. The following year, they joined bands including Dinosaur Junior, Alice in Chains, and Rage Against the Machine for *Lollapalooza 1993*. Since the band's breakup, Barbero has been deeply committed to the independent music scene in Minnesota and around the world. She has also been in half a dozen other bands; Sean Na Na, Eggtwist, The Willis Project and most recently, Koalas. Nobody plays drums like Lori.

Adrian Danciu (Director of Photography): Adrian is an award-winning cameraman that started his career in Romania where he worked for Romanian Television and was involved with projects ranging from breaking news, documentary dramas to educational videos. His assignments took him from crowded city streets to remote regions of the Carpathian Mountains and underwater caves of the Banat region. He is also credited in documentaries for Duna TV and Hungarian Television in Budapest, Hungary and WDR in Germany.

Upon moving to Minneapolis, MN in 1999 Adrian contributed to programs originated on NBC, PBS and several production companies. He also enjoyed photographing treasure hunters for National Geographic Television in the Gulf of Mexico, the Caroline Rhea Show at the Mall of America and Frozen Feet Films independent documentary film project: *Urban Explorers*. He is currently in production with a story about our ancestors: *The Early Humans in Europe*.

Carly Zuckweiler (Sound Designer)

Zuckweiler is the primary audio engineer and sound designer at HDMG, a video post-production house in Eden Prairie, MN. She has worked with a broad spectrum of clients including Cargill, Regis, Best Buy, Target, and Honeywell. Prior to working with HDMG she has worked on staff and freelanced as a sound designer and/or audio engineer for many clients including Ghost Productions (Roseville, MN) Quad Recording Studios (New York, NY), Ripon Public Schools, Paradime Media, Inc., the Oshkosh Symphony Orchestra, the Wisconsin Symphonic Winds, and Pop/Rock group Subdivider.